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SIPDIS

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STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
NSC FOR JWOOD
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SUBJECT: PANJSHIR PROVINCE: EXCELLENT SECURITY, GOOD GOVERNANCE AND
IMPROVING INFRASTRUCTURE

11. (SBU) Summary: Panjshir has no insurgent threat and generally good governance, making reconstruction and development projects possible in the province. With Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) and "Good Performer" money guaranteed to flow for at least the next fiscal cycle, Panjshir can expect continued infrastructure development. The province's unique geography, overwhelmingly rural character, and mono-ethnicity are all factors in its good performance. End Summary.

Security

12. (SBU) In 2007, there were only a handful of security incidents in Panjshir, including an attack on a girls' school and an attempted IED attack. In late summer, a small group of Taliban was caught and arrested inside the province; they were lured to Panjshir from Baghlan by a successful National Directorate of Security (NDS) sting operation. Governor Bahlul gives much of the credit for the province's security to the locals, who notice any outsiders, whether by appearance or by accent, and question their reason for being in the valley. The "Lion's Gate" checkpoint at the narrowest point of the Panjshir river valley remains the only way in and out for all vehicles, providing additional control. PRT officials are able to travel within the province with no body armor and in unarmored vehicles. Panjshir's Afghan National Police (ANP) contingent was reduced in 2007, against the wishes of the Governor, but regardless of ANP numbers, the fundamental factor protecting the province is likely to remain its "community-watch" posture. The provincial leadership remains on guard against insurgents disguised as outside contractors, and the PRT and the provincial security forces screen contractors who come to Panjshir, typically from Kabul.

13. (SBU) The first PRT rotations in Panjshir (2005-2006) focused on the issue of landmine- and munition-stockpiles in Panjshir. This issue has faded in importance for several reasons. After several months of quietly carting out the landmines in unmarked trucks to Kabul, the Afghan Ministry of Defense (MoD) in late 2007 issued a written certification that Panjshir was landmine-free. In addition, the GIROA announced that the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program's deadline would be extended for another four years, removing any sense of urgency. Panjshir maintains several munition stockpiles inside the valley guarded by the Afghan National Army (ANA) - the only regular ANA presence in the valley. Due to the possibility that munitions from these stockpiles could be

bought or stolen and smuggled out of the valley, it would be preferable that the stockpiles be transferred to MOD central storage, but the MOD appears to be satisfied with the status quo. The ANA chief of staff, Bismullah Khan, is a prominent Panjshiri.

¶4. (SBU) Panjshir remains poppy free and stands to benefit from the "Good Performance Initiative". There are no poppy farmers in Panjshiri jails, only drug traffickers, and visits from the PRT suggest these traffickers endure harsher jail conditions than murderers.

Governance

¶5. (SBU) Governor Haji Bahlul Bahij remains the key politician in the province. He continues to grow in sophistication and confidence; he appears to act honestly, and his stature in the province is unchallenged. He makes oft-repeated appeals to "democracy," which in his view means having popular support for any undertaking and showing value-for-money in the execution of projects and the delivery of services. He stays focused on the Panjshir and does not involve himself in national issues.

¶6. (SBU) The Provincial Council (PC) in Panjshir has little authority. The Governor does not turn to the PC for advice, nor does the PC challenge the Governor. The PC does provide an interface for the PRT with local communities. The PRT involves individual PC members in trips throughout the valley; from the communities' side, the PC members are (unfortunately) seen all too often as messengers to deliver supplicants' requests to the PRT.

¶7. (SBU) The district managers of Panjshir's six districts are variable in quality, as are the Panjshir ministry line directors. The best are the line directors for economy, education, and public

KABUL 00000086 002 OF 002

health, who display organization and commitment. At the bottom are the line directors for women's affairs, public works, and information/culture, who have consistently demonstrated their incompetence and, in some instances, their venality.

¶8. (SBU) The ANP chief, General Waliullah, does not enjoy the trust of the Governor. At the district level, the PRT has very close and good relations with the district chiefs, and ANP officers regularly accompany PRT missions. While the ANP's recent reduction in size is probably not critical to the handling of routine crimes, it could be significant in denying the ANP the ability to monitor adequately the province's borders. (Note: although safeguarded by high mountains on all sides, Panjshir borders provinces with active insurgencies.)

¶9. (SBU) Official corruption is not a concern in Panjshir, and Governor Bahlul can appear almost cocky when challenging visitors to find a single incidence in which Panjshir has been cited for official corruption. This apparent lack of corruption may have several reasons. First, there is no poppy crop and no significant drug trade. Second, Panjshir's close-knit society means that suspicious financial activity would come to the attention of the authorities; as long as the Governor is feared as an enforcer, would-be embezzlers and siphoners have to wonder if the risk is worth the reward. Finally, Panjshiri officials mostly live in Panjshir with their families; thus, they do not have the need to steal money to subsidize family members living elsewhere, especially family members living abroad.

Development

¶10. (U) Panjshir's leaders see infrastructure as the priority. In spring 2007, USAID completed Panjshir's first paved road, covering 47 kilometers and costing 20 million dollars. CJTF-82 and TF Cincinnatus have provided more than 10 million dollars to fund two spurs off the paved road to provide road access to most of the valley's population. Panjshir will soon have new district center buildings in all six districts. At the provincial government center in Bazarak, construction is underway on buildings for ministries (agriculture, public works, finance) and for the governor and other organizations (Red Crescent, Afghanistan Bank). Privately-funded cellphone towers and cellphone coverage have made their way further

and further up the valley.

¶11. (U) The NGO presence in Panjshir is less than expected in a province that is free from insurgency. One notable exception is "Emergency", an Italian NGO that has run Panjshir's only hospital and some clinics for several years.

¶12. (U) Power remains a constraint, although the agriculture-based economy allows the Panjshir to use relatively little electricity, generated by small hydro-electric generators along the Panjshir river. Additional power will come from a CERP-funded wind-turbine project - Afghanistan's first - due to come on-line in the spring of ¶2008.

WOOD